



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR JAMES E. "JIM" KING, JR.
President

February 1, 2003

Fellow Senators and members of the Senate Family:

As many of you did this Saturday morning, Linda and I watched with great shock and sadness as the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated on re-entry over the skies of Texas. Columbia was on its way home to Florida, coming home to the same Florida coastline from which it had launched sixteen days ago.

As the home of our nation's space program, Floridians feel a deep sense of loss on this day. Our deepest condolences go to the families and friends of the seven astronauts we lost today. Our sympathies are also extended to all the dedicated members of the NASA family, whose commitment to the exploration of space always marvels us. Our thoughts are with all of you.

Exploration is dangerous work. As with those explorers that sailed the high seas or climbed the highest peaks in their searches for discovery, so too have astronauts stretched the limits of our imagination in their quests. The Columbia Seven now join the ranks of those heroic men and women, who overcame fear in their quest for discovery and who history honors as brave.

This morning, I re-read the remarks President Reagan had given to the nation in January of 1986 in the wake of the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. As a side note in his memoirs, President Reagan told the story of one of the widows of the fallen Challenger astronauts, who gave him the note her husband had written her before the flight and left on their bedroom dresser. The three by five card read as follows:

"For man, there is no rest and no ending. He must go on – conquest beyond conquest. This little planet, and its winds and ways, and all the laws of mind and matter that restrain him. Then the planets about him, and, at last out across the immensity to the stars. And when he has conquered all the depths of space and all the mysteries of time, still he will be but beginning."

Those words comforted us seventeen years ago this week, after we lost our first Space Shuttle. They've comforted me today, and I hope they will give comfort to all of us who share in this loss.

February 1, 2003

Page 2

We live in interesting times. As we mourn this loss, let us pause and remember, but let us also recommit ourselves to meeting the challenges of discovery which our Florida-based space program rises to face time after time from the same coast of Florida on which Ponce de Leon landed. That would serve as our greatest tribute to these heroes.

Sincerely,

James E. King, Jr.
President